

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /079 W

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8586

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 5798

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, RP, XF

SUBJECT: MINDANAO REFERENDUM

REF: (A) MANILA 5632; (B) TRIPOLI 0478

SUMMARY: PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF APRIL 17 REFERENDUM INDICATE OVERWHELMING VOTE AGAINST MNLF-DOMINATED "AUTONOMY" AND AGAINST ANY ALTERATION IN EXISTING REGIONAL SYSTEM. VOTER TURNOUT APPARENTLY LIGHT, BUT NO DISORDER REPORTED. APPARENTLY IN REACTION TO OBJECTIONS FROM ISLAMIC CONFERENCE, SECDEF ENRILE TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT REFERENDUM WAS JUST A "BARGAINING POINT" AND THAT DELEGATION IS ARRIVING FROM MIDDLE EAST ON APRIL 20 FOR FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF VOTING IN 12 PROVINCES OF MINDANAO-SULU PLUS PALAWAN AS REPORTED BY MANILA MEDIA INDICATE APPROXIMATELY 90 PERCENT VOTE IN FAVOR GO GOVERNMENT POSITIONS, I.E. AGAINST MERGER OF REGIONS IX AND XII AND AGAINST
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MNLF-DOMINATED "AUTONOMY." BY SOMEWHAT SMALL MARGIN, VOTERS VOICED APPROVAL OF GOVERNMENT VERSION OF AUTONOMY APPROVED BY LEGISLATIVE ADVISORY COUNCIL LAST FEBRUARY. THERE WERE NO REPORTED INCIDENTS OF DISORDER. TURNOUT APPARENTLY RANGED FROM LIGHT TO MODERATE. IN APPARENT EFFORT TO SUGGEST CREDIBILITY, PRESS REPORTS SOME PARTICIPATION BY MNLF RANK-AND-FILE, DESPITE LEADERSHIP'S CALL FOR BOYCOTT,

AND ALSO THAT MUSLIMS IN SOME ISOLATED LOCAL COMMUNITIES (E.G. VILLAGE ON BASILAN) VOTED FOR MERGER OF REGIONS IX AND XII AND FOR MNLF LEADERSHIP OF AUTONOMOUS REGION.

2. FOREIGN OBSERVER TEAMS (ONE OF WHICH INCLUDED US EMBASSY PRESS ATTACHE SCHOONOVER) WERE HEAVILY PROGRAMMED AND ESCORTED BY MILITARY, BUT ABLE TO CONFIRM THAT VOTING GENERALLY PERACEFUL AND THAT TURNOUT OFTER LIGHT. SCHOONOVER'S GROUP SAW ONE COMMUNITY TALLY SHEET IN ZAMBOANGA ON WHICH ONLY 17 OUT OF 400 PLUS VOTERS PARTICIPATED. SEVERAL DIPLOMATIS (NOT INCLUDING SCHOONOVER) WERE QUOTED BY PRESS AS VOICING EXTRAVAGANT PRAISE FOR PEACEFUL NATURE OF VOTING, ETC. OBERVERS WERE TOLD THAT FINAL TABULATION WOULD PROBABLY BE ANNOUNCED APRIL 20 OR 21.

3. APPARENTLY IN REACTION TO RUMORED ISLAMIC CONFERENCE OBJECTIONS TO REFERENDUM, SECRETARY ENRILE TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT REFERENDUM WAS JUST A "BARGAINING POINT." ENRILE SAID DELEGATION EXPECTED TO ARRIVE FROM MIDDLE EAST APRIL 20, INCLUDING LIBYAN FORNSEC AL TREKKI, QUADRI-PARTITE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN ABDUL KARIM GAYE AND SOME MNLF LEADERS (NOT NOT NUR MISUARI). THIS GROUP WILL CONDUCT FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS WITH GOP. ENRILE EXPRESSED GRATIFIC- CATION THAT REFERENDUM HAD NOT LED TO BREAKDOWN OF CEASEFIRE IN MINDANAO.

4. MANILA PRESS EARLIER CARRIED STATEMENT FROM NUR MISUARI (AS REPORTED BY REUTERS FROM JIDDA) ALLEGING THAT REFERENDUM WAS "ILLEGAL." THIS WAS BALANCED BY HEAVY CONFIDENTIAL

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PUBLICITY GIVEN TO (A) SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF NEW GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT OIL AGREEMENT WITH SAUDIS -- SEPTTEL; (B) ARRIVAL OF HIGH-RANKING EGYPTIAN PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION; (C) ACTIVITIES OF 14-MAN TRADE MISSION FROM ABU DHABI; AND (D) STATEMENTS OF LIBYAN CHARGE DRIEZA THAT GOL NOT CONNECTED WITH MNLF DECISION TO BOYCOTT POLLS AND THAT GOL TAKS NOW ONE OF PERSUADING MNLF TO COMPROMISE WITH GOP. (JUST FOR GOOD MEASURE, DRIEZA ALLEGEDLY ASSERTED THAT LIBYA HAD NEVER PROVIDED ARMS AID TO MNLF, ONLY MONEY.) NET EFFECT OF THIS PUBLICITY IS TO SUGGEST TO READERS THAT REGARDLESS OF ARAB REACTIONS TO MARCOS-QADHAFI AGREEMENT AND REFERENDUM, PHILIPPINE RELATIONS WITH MIDDLE EAST ARE IMPROVING BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS.

5. COMMENT: RESULTS IN MINDANAO ARE NO SURPRISE, BUT IT WILL BE SOME TIME BEFORE MUSLIM REACTION TO POLLING CAN BE JUDGED WITH ACCURACY. THUS FAR GOP HAS SUCCEDED IN KEEPING PUBLIC THOROUGHLY CONFUSED. LACK OF IMMEDIATE VIOLENT REACTION TO REFERENDUM IS ENCOURAGING. ARRIVAL

OF ISLAMIC CONFERENCE DELEGATION FROM MIDDLE EAST SHOULD
AT VERY LEAST BUY MORE TIME FOR GOP. UNFORTUNATELY,
POSSIBILITY REMAINS THAT STRONG NEGATIVE REACTION FROM
MNLF LEADERSHIP ABROAD COULD LEAD TO RENEWED FIGHTING.
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